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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VILNIUS 001121

SIPDIS

FOR SECRETARY RUMSFELD FROM AMBASSADOR MULL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/18/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [LH](#)

SUBJECT: YOUR VISIT TO LITHUANIA

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen D. Mull for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Mr. Secretary, you will arrive in Lithuania this weekend with our relations with this small but steadfast ally at their best level yet. Lithuania supports and participates in every major U.S. foreign policy initiative. Its Provincial Reconstruction Team in Chagcharan, Afghanistan -- which President Adamkus and I visited last week -- has made important strides in ensuring the area's stability and beginning reconstruction efforts, with extensive U.S. support. Lithuania's successive governments have expressed an unwavering and open-ended commitment to our common effort in Iraq, pledging to keep its 100 troops there as long as necessary. We have close and tight cooperation with Lithuania's security forces in fighting the war on terror. Within the EU, Lithuania has been a stalwart advocate for stronger transatlantic ties and NATO's primacy in European security. In its immediate neighborhood, Lithuania has been an energetic supporter of President Bush's freedom agenda, from its warm hospitality to Belarus's embattled democrats to its high intensity mentoring of the militaries and governments in Moldova, Georgia and Azerbaijan.

2. (U) We have already planted the seeds for this close relationship to grow in future generations. For example, Lithuania has 10 students currently enrolled in the four U.S. service academies and 11 alumni -- one of the highest per capita representations in the world.

3. (C) On a personal level, President Adamkus is especially eager to renew your acquaintance, which he said he began politicking with you in freezing Chicago weather during your 1962 campaign for Congress. Adamkus is an especially strong asset to our bilateral relationship, intervening at key points in Lithuania's internal politics to keep its pro-U.S. foreign policy agenda on track. Thank you especially for making time on your schedule to see Prime Minister Algirdas Brazauskas, who has been a more skeptical partner in supporting Lithuania's growing international military commitments. Your meeting will undoubtedly shore up his support and enthusiasm for our military cooperation.

4. (C) While our relationship is exceptionally smooth and warm, I wanted to alert you to a number of issues that may arise during the bilateral portion of your visit here:

AIR DEFENSE

The recent crash of an errant Russian SU-27 onto Lithuanian territory ignited a furious internal debate here about the adequacy of Lithuania's air defense. Taunts from senior Russian officials questioning NATO's value during the episode only intensified the reaction, which included a formal parliamentary instruction to press for making NATO's interim air policing of the Baltics permanent. Senior defense officials have seized on the incident to mount a campaign for increased defense spending -- in particular, an extra \$7 million to fund a major upgrade of Lithuania's air radar system. During his visit to Lithuania last week, Congressman Jim Kolbe instructed his staff to begin exploring whether the U.S. might be able to help in this area. You can be certain your interlocutors will seek your support for this effort in your meetings.

DEFENSE SPENDING

We here at the U.S. Mission have pressed the Lithuanian government to increase defense spending from its current level of 1.27% of GDP to bring it in line with the 2% NATO standard. The government is trying to heed the call -- its draft 2006 budget proposes upping absolute defense spending by 10.5%, but Lithuania's booming GDP growth of 6-7% per annum means defense spending as a share of GDP will increase only to 1.4%. Your support for Lithuania's continuing efforts to up that figure, particularly in your meeting with the Prime Minister, would be welcome.

AFGHANISTAN PRT

With significant U.S. support, Lithuania's 113 troops on the

ground in Ghor province are doing a terrific job. Our request that Lithuania assume sustainment costs when the U.S.-funded contract expires on March 31 has prompted some Lithuanian apprehension about their ability to pay the bill. The Lithuanians are exploring whether to revise their proposed use of Coalition Solidarity Funds to cover the costs, and may ask you whether there is any possibility of continued U.S. support with the burden.

VISAS -----

Virtually no senior American visitor comes to Lithuania without getting a question on when Lithuanians will be able to travel to the United States without visas. President Bush earlier this year announced a "Visa Waiver Program Roadmap" for our central and eastern European allies to help them improve their eligibility for visa-free travel. Lithuania is an active participant in the program, and we work intensively with the government here in a public diplomacy campaign to reduce the number of illegal Lithuanian workers and overstays in the United States -- the principal reason for Lithuania's ineligibility.

BELARUS -----

Lithuania has been active far beyond its size in providing support for democratization in Belarus, and it takes its responsibility as the NATO contact embassy in Minsk seriously. But economic interests often collude to pressure the government to circumvent the ban on contacts with senior Belarusian officials. Recently, Prime Minister Brazauskas defied an EU ban on senior level contacts by hosting the Belarusian Prime Minister to dinner to discuss bilateral economic issues. If you have the opportunity during the Brazauskas meeting, I would encourage you to remind him of the importance of maintaining a united democratic front on keeping pressure on the Lukashenko regime.

15. (U) Mr. Secretary, thank you for adding Lithuania to your busy schedule. We eagerly look forward to supporting your visit.
Respectfully,
Steve Mull
MULL